

Decision Points for Return-to-Work Policy

I. Scope (Defining who should be included within this policy)

There are no decision points within this section.

II. Policy Statement

Decision Point No. 2 **What type of statement will you include which will detail why your agency believes in a return-to-work program?** This statement will outline your philosophy on return to work. There are two samples provided in the sample return-to-work policy or you can create your own.

III. Definitions

Decision Point No. 3 **How will you document the transitional duty assignment that has been given?** It is important to document what type of duties are being performed while in the transitional duty along with a start date and end date. This should be presented to the employee for his/her signature along with the attending physician. If the transitional employment plan is used, it will serve as documentation. If you do not have documentation of the transitional duty, there is no verification of the job duties that the employee is being asked to perform.

Will you use the transitional employment plan (TEP) in order to secure approval from the employee, supervisor, and physician?

Benefits: This document that has been created to provide a snapshot to all involved parties as to the duties and physical demands of the transitional duty position. It also requires signature by the attending physician, employee, and supervisor. This will document that transitional duty has been offered and becomes part of the employee's treatment plan.

Risks: None

If you are not using the TEP, how is this transitional duty documented within your agency?

Benefits: If you do not want to use the TEP, you should consider documenting the duties/demands of the transitional duty position in some written form. The reason is so that you can have documentation to provide to all parties if the transitional duty has any problems.

Risks: You might not include necessary information that is provided in the TEP and could impact the transitional duty.

Decision Point No. 4 **Will you use a transitional employment team that could include the supervisor, Human Resources, Safety Director, Return-to-Work Coordinator, employee, etc. to develop transitional duty assignments?**

Benefits: This team could meet together for an initial meeting and evaluate if they are able to provide transitional duty. Everyone can give ideas as to what type of assignments need to be completed within a department rather than just one person (supervisor or Human Resources). There is also input from the employee on what he/she can contribute during the transitional duty.

Risks: The downside of a team is coordinating a meeting time. This will increase staff workload. If you are not able to commit to a team, then attempt to include the employee as Human Resources or the supervisor implement the transitional duty.

IV. Procedures

Decision Point No. 5 **Will you include in your policy the steps involved when a person is injured within your agency?**

Benefits: All employees will understand how to file a claim. They will also understand who is responsible for reporting their claim to the Workers' Compensation Program (WCP).

Risks: None

Will you include in your policy the steps involved when a person has a non-occupational injury/illness?

Benefits: All employees will understand the process that is used when they have a non-occupational injury/illness. Most agencies will be sent a transitional duty form from VSDP to complete to accept the restrictions or not.

Risks: None

Decision Point No. 6 **Who does the supervisor submit the Employer's Accident Report to within the agency?** Please follow your current policy.

If you do not have a current policy, most agencies use their Human Resources' office to submit these confidential reports.

Decision Point No. 7 **Who is responsible for submitting the Employer's Accident Report to the WCP?** Please follow your current policy. If you do not have a current policy, most agencies use their Human Resources' office to submit these confidential reports.

Decision Point No. 8 **Who will confirm that the employee is offered a panel of physicians?** Most agencies have a panel of physicians that is given to the employee based upon their injury. The employee will complete the panel selection and will submit this normally to their Human Resources' office or supervisor.

Decision Point No. 9 **Who is responsible for communicating with the attending physician to ensure a safe and timely return to work?** Either the supervisor or the Return-to-Work Coordinator should be involved with this communication. By communication, you can do this in writing, by phone, on-site meetings, etc. Due to time constraints, most agencies will be able to communicate with the physician's office by phone or by letter. This will usually allow the agency to gather necessary information.

Benefits: You are establishing a relationship between the attending physician, the employee, and the agency. You can educate the physician on your agency and even allow for them to visit your location.

Risks: None

Decision Point No. 10 **Who is responsible within your agency for submitting the position description or physical demands form to the physician and what timeframe would you require?** If the initial appointment does not involve a release to the pre-injury position, this should be submitted as soon as possible to the physician after the initial medical visit, preferably before the follow-up appointment. This can be submitted by Human Resources or the supervisor, whomever in the agency that has access to these records.

Benefits: The benefits are that you acknowledge who is responsible for sending this to the physician and also you are requiring a timeframe to ensure the physician receives the form in an appropriate manner.

Risks: None

Decision Point No. 11 **If the employee is released to return to work in their pre-injury position, who is responsible for coordinating the employee's return to work?** This could include the Return-to-Work Coordinator or the supervisor.

Decision Point No. 12 **Who is responsible for communicating with the WCP or VSDP, if applicable?** This should be either someone responsible for Workers' Compensation or the Return-to-Work Coordinator who can communicate regarding the employee's work status. Preferably, this person will also be assisting with the employee's return to work within the agency.

Decision Point No. 13 **Who is responsible for the initial return-to-work meeting and what is the timeframe?** The Return-to-Work Coordinator or the supervisor should schedule this meeting. On the timeframe, our recommendation would also be to schedule the initial return-to-work meeting within twenty-four hours of receiving the attending physician's release to work with restrictions. This would allow the employee to return to work as soon as possible.

Decision Point No. 14 **Will your policy allow for temporary transfer to other work units?**

Benefits: The benefit of looking to the pre-injury department is that you are putting the employee in their normal environment, original supervisor and original co-workers. However, if it is not safe, cost effective, etc., then a second alternative could be to look within another department. This department might have a need for someone with limited capabilities. They could have a special project, be understaffed, etc. This allows the employee to return to work even in a different workspace. This employment should be meaningful and should allow the employee to contribute his/her knowledge and skills.

Risks: This will be an increased workload for staff including the new supervisor. There will also be budget issues that will arise.

Decision Point No. 15 **Who is responsible for communication and follow-up with the physician, employee, WCP, and VSDP if applicable when the employee is unable to return to work?** The suggestion would be to communicate with these parties after each follow-up medical appointment with the attending physician.

Benefits: There can be one central person within the agency that is responsible for communication with these parties if possible. This

could be either someone responsible for Workers' Compensation or the Return-to-Work Coordinator. This will enable your agency to foster a working relationship with these parties and develop in-depth understanding of the employee's prognosis and work status.

Risks: None

What is the timeframe for this communication? At the minimum, this person should be communicating with all parties monthly to assess the employee's work status.

Decision Point No. 16 **Who is responsible for communicating the return to work with the WCP and VSDP, if applicable?** Please refer to Decision Point No. 12.

Decision Point No. 17 **Will you meet monthly or more frequently?** It would be beneficial to have an open communication line between the employee and the Return-to-Work Coordinator. However, monthly meetings would allow for discussion about the transitional duty and the employee's progress or lack thereof.